The Health, work and well-being agenda

Introduction

Starting with its Health, Work and Well-being strategy, launched in 2005, the Government has been broadening the scope of potential interventions that impact on the NHS. First through Dame Carol Black’s review *Working for a healthier tomorrow* and the Government response *Improving health and work: changing lives*, then through the launch of the NHS Constitution with its pledges on staff health and well-being. The current Boorman Review illustrates that where NHS organisations prioritise staff health and well-being performance is enhanced, patient care improves, staff retention is higher and sickness absence is lower and makes a number of recommendations that the Government has accepted in full.

All of these documents make a strong case for greater employer and employee involvement in improving the health and well-being of staff as a way of improving services and ensuring a fit and healthy workforce for the future.

This chapter looks at each of these publications and highlights the issues for managers in the NHS and the expectations being placed on them for delivering a fitter and healthier service.

The Health, Work and Well-being Strategy

The Health, Work and Well-being strategy, which emphasised the importance of creating healthy working environments, was launched by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive in October 2005.

It set out a blueprint for change to create healthier working environments but also to ensure people get the help and understanding they need to stay in work or return to work, when appropriate.

The statistics are compelling. More than 35 million work days are lost each year in the UK to occupational ill health and injury, costing the economy an estimated £12 billion.

Working for a Healthier Tomorrow

Dame Carol Black’s review of the health of the working age population, *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*, was published in March 2008 and set out the costs of working age ill health to Britain. As well as identifying that there are 2.6 million people on incapacity benefits, of whom as many as 50 per cent could be rehabilitated back into work, Dame Carol reported that as many as 6 million people who are in work have long-standing health conditions. The
evidence suggests that, with basic healthcare and workplace management, most people with common health conditions can work.

The review set out a number of recommendations to support employers with creating safe and accommodating workplaces. The recommendations included the following.

- The Business Health Check tool, which enables businesses to estimate the costs of sickness absence, turnover, worker ill health and injury to their organisations. It also helps to identify the savings that can be generated through investing in health and well-being and to measure the return on investment.
- The National Strategy for Mental Health and Employment, which supports employers to tackle the issues of stigma and discrimination.
- Development of the NHS Plus network of NHS occupational health providers.
- Development of a national occupational health helpline for small businesses.
- A review of the health and well-being of the NHS workforce which would consider evidence for where priorities should be for system change and make recommendations for action to enable local delivery.

**Improving health and work: changing lives**

The Government’s response to *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*, published in November 2008, set out a programme of work which included the following.

- Introduction of an electronic ‘fit note’ to replace the current medical certificate and help GPs switch the focus of their advice to employers from what people cannot do to what they can.
- A National Education Programme for GPs to help improve their knowledge and skills and confidence when dealing with health and work issues.
- Health, Work and Well-being co-ordinators to stimulate action on health, work and well-being issues in their local areas, offering advice and support and engagement with smaller businesses.
- Improving work and workplaces – the Government accepted all of the recommendations made for assisting employers to improve the health and well-being of their employees.
• Piloting early intervention services at local level to help manage people back in to work at the earliest sensible time.

The NHS Constitution

The NHS Constitution for England was published on 21 January 2009 to:

“establish the principles and values of the NHS. It sets out the rights to which patients, public and staff are entitled, and pledges which the NHS is committed to achieve, together with responsibilities which the public, patients and staff owe to one another to ensure the NHS operates fairly and effectively”.

The principles commit employers to aspire to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism in the people the NHS employs and the education, training and development they receive.

The pledges commit the NHS to provide support and opportunities for staff to maintain their health, well-being and safety and to engage them in decisions that affect them.

The NHS values commit the service to strive to improve health and well-being and people’s experience of the NHS.

NHS Health and Well-being Review

Dr Steve Boorman was appointed to lead a review of NHS staff health and well-being in early 2009 and produced his final report in November 2009.

The interim report, published in August 2009, set out a vision of a staff health and well-being service which is:

• focused on prevention and health improvement as well as providing excellent support for staff who present with ill health and sickness

• proactive in tackling the causes of ill health, both work related and lifestyle related as well as responding effectively to cases presenting for treatment. This should include the provision of early intervention services where these are of clear benefit to individuals, patients and the trust

• centred on, and responsive to, staff and their concerns, as well as providing responsive advice to management, with services available to staff through both self referral and managerial referral

• holistic, bringing together the variety of initiatives in occupational and public health in a single approach
• embedded as a core element of trust business, with appropriate resourcing and routine monitoring and reporting to the board
• supported by a service specification setting out clear expectations of the service
• fully connected with wider NHS provision especially general practice and public health.

The final report and response from the Department of Health was published on 23 November 2009.

Key recommendations from the report include:

• ensuring that NHS organisations have a prevention focused health and well-being strategy in place for staff
• making senior management accountable at each organisation for staff health and well-being, which will be measured as part of the annual assessments of NHS performance
• ensuring that there are early interventions for staff with musculoskeletal and mental health conditions, to help minimise the time staff must spend suffering with these problems and support early return to work.

The Department of Health has published an action plan for implementing the recommendations and has set aside £6.5m for putting in place national systems required to support the NHS to deliver this.